

# Chapter 1

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## *Speculation and Historicism: Between Hegel and Eternity*

### **Speculative Mind and the Middle: Between Time and Its Other**

What, however, the age *needs* in the deepest sense can be said fully and completely with one single word: it needs . . . eternity. The misfortune of our time is just this, that it has become simply nothing else but "time," the temporal, which is impatient of hearing anything about eternity; and so (with the best of intentions or furiously) would make eternity quite superfluous by means of a cunningly devised counterfeit, which, however, in all eternity will not succeed; for the more one thinks oneself to be able, or hardens oneself to be able, to get along without the eternal, the more one feels the essential need of it.

Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*

When Kierkegaard said this, he sharply saw through his own era and was clairvoyant as to what might succeed it. The ambiguities of time and eternity still persist, as does our impatience with anything other than time. In reflecting on these ambiguities, I want to think against this impatience. Hegel dominated the intellectual milieu of Kierkegaard's time, but he, too, incarnated these ambiguities. Some of them he understood, others he misunderstood and perpetuated. Any rethinking of speculative philosophy, and not necessarily in an Hegelian sense, demands attention to these ambiguities.

One finds today a tendency to enlist Hegel as an ally for an essentially historicist conception of philosophy. Such an historicist Hegelianism is one shorn of the absolute, shorn, too, of any daring claims made for philosophy as an absolute knowing. The historicist Hegel is one stripped of the speculative dimension. This dimension

recalls Hegel's continuity with the entire metaphysical tradition and its respect for *theōria* as the highest mindfulness. This continuity is now broken by many thinkers after Hegel and for reasons connected to historicism. With this break the very identity of speculative philosophy is put in question.

This break is not only an intraphilosophical affair. In our post-Hegelian times, the corrosion of traditional religious and ethical values, coupled with the skeptical legacy of positivism in relation to metaphysics, coupled, too, with the instrumentalizing of being by technicism and scientism—all these induce a certain amount of epistemological squirming, when words like "absolute" are uttered. Those who hold that reason is essentially instrumental especially reject speculative philosophy, since traditionally the speculative required a mode of contemplative mind that transcended instrumentalization. If all reason is instrumental, inevitably the speculative must be empty for reason.

There is a philosophical irony here. Not a few critics of instrumental reason are in agreement with the advocates of instrumental reason in regard to just this suspicion of speculative philosophy. We find a startling agreement between positivism and various forms of post-Nietzschean thought, *vis-à-vis* the critique of traditional metaphysics. For example, Heideggerian hermeneutics is anathema to positivistic philosophy. Yet Heideggerians, strong critics of technicist thought, do agree with technicist thinking in calling speculative philosophy into question under the rubric "metaphysics of presence," "ontotheology." In their "destruction of metaphysics," they are surprisingly at one with the positivistic scorn.

Nietzscheans and sundry post-structuralists offer variations on the theme: speculative mind is rejected as the "phallogocentric" *theōria* of Platonism. Negative dialecticians, like Adorno, also strong critics of instrumental reason, are similarly suspicious of speculative philosophy. Indeed when Adorno says: After Auschwitz, not only no poetry, but no speculative philosophy—it is as if speculative philosophy was in complicity with this horror. This suspicion, indeed reduction of the speculative, tends to be a pervasive feature of forms of Left-Hegelianism indebted to Marx. What all these share is an unprecedented accentuation of the importance of time and a correlative depreciation, if not outright rejection, of any appeal to the trans-temporal, to eternity. Hence Kierkegaard's clairvoyance.

This suspicion of speculation exerts its influence on the self-understanding of philosophy itself, as is reflected in one of the more discussed current issues, namely, that of "foundationalism." It is not always univocally clear what this issue is. But among a number of

things, foundationalism implies the desire for some indubitable and incorrigible standpoint, or beginning or principle or ground, relative to which all meaning and knowing may be subsequently derived and legitimated. The incorrigible foundation will present itself to philosophy with a self-evidence and immediate transparency, and hence will be the court of first and final appeal in the adjudication of rational disputes.

Modern philosophy since Descartes is often presented as implementing such a foundationalist project, understood as the epistemological validation of claims to rational knowing. And there is little doubt that major strands of modern philosophy have sought the requisite foundation in the *cogito*, in human subjectivity itself, or the transcendental ego or its derivatives or surrogates. Hegel has been located in this tradition, and many aspects of his thought are continuous with its project. While he modifies the Cartesian foundationalism of the *cogito*, absolute spirit seems to serve a similar role, albeit complexly qualified. Absolute spirit reveals the first and final principle, the Idea relative to which everything is derived, relative to which everything is developmentally and teleologically oriented, relative to which all claims to know being are to be authenticated.

Today this aspect of Hegel's thought is understressed and a more historicist interpretation found more congenial. By contrast to foundationalism, historicism tends to deny any ultimate principles of intelligibility that remain constant throughout time's flux. It denies any claim to absolute knowing, precisely because every such claim is dependent on a host of historical relativities and contingencies. If we take these seriously, and the implied finitude of understanding, any claim to absolute foundations must be given up. Rather than a foundationalist view, we find a hermeneutical view which runs: Hegel was one of the first to underscore the intertwining of history and knowing, including philosophical knowing; philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought, he says, and thereby excludes any leap to an extra-temporal perspective; and though he spoke the idiom of classical metaphysics, in that very speaking, the metaphysician's proclivity to see things *sub specie aeternitatis*, in effect, is being dismantled and undermined; there are no trans-temporal foundations; the "foundations" are epoch-relative constructions of *Geist* as it historically unfolds.<sup>1</sup>

I will argue that these alternatives are not adequate to untangle the issues at stake, nor Hegel's views. A defense of speculative mind, which is historically self-conscious, need not be intended in any normal historicist sense. Nor need we appeal to a static, substance-like foundation, dualistically the opposite of becoming and history.

The issue is not a static eternity opposed to time, nor an Archimedean point outside history, but a hermeneutical mindfulness of the emergence of ultimacy within and through time, an emergence that is not a reduction to time *simpliciter*. Hegel himself develops a *dialectical middle* between an ahistorical foundationalism and an historicist anti-foundationalism. He suggests a hermeneutics of time wherein what we comprehend is not just time. His famous statement—philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought—is endlessly reiterated by those wishing to bolster the historicist conception. But we must ask with even more persistence: What does philosophy in time comprehend in time? Is it just time? Or is it the ground of temporal becoming that itself cannot be called a product of temporal becoming? Time's own other might be comprehended through time itself.

Since my interest is not simply with an exegesis of Hegel but with the matter itself, the major questions we must ask include: What would time's other be? Would it be what the ancients called eternity? Is this why Hegel offers a doctrine of absolute spirit and not just a hermeneutic of historicist rationality? Is there such a thing as a dialectical middle between time and eternity? What would this be? What follows from this middle for philosophical reason? Are there ambiguities about Hegel's dialectical middle that prepare the ground for a more thoroughgoing historicism, perhaps against Hegel's own intentions, or rather in line with one set of intentions but at odds with another set? Do we find a double set of intentions in Hegel, distributed between a logicist and a hermeneutical understanding of reason? Does this doubleness of intention show up in the task set for philosophy itself? And do the ambiguities of the dialectical middle undercut the ostensible purpose to mediate between ahistorical foundationalism and hermeneutical historicism, with the result that eternity is reduced to time in the final dialectical reckoning? Is time's other then collapsed into time? What then, with this collapse, would the properly speculative dimension of philosophy be?

The many sides of the matter demand that I take a kind of serpentine route. The middle asks for metaphysical meditation; with these questions it must be crossed and crisscrossed. With the serpentine Hegel as my interlocutor (but also others like Plato, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger), my reflections below will mix the expository, the interpretative, the critical and the speculative. First, I will speak of the fate of speculation after Hegel in the light of history's perceived relevance for philosophy. Marx will here be important. Second, I will focus on some important general characteristics of historicism. Third, I will situate Hegel's speculative response, in contrast to the widespread instrumentalization of reason we find in modernity, both

before and after Hegel. Fourth, I will develop some implications, including some pertaining to Heidegger's attitude to the history of philosophy. Fifth, I will remark on the issue of philosophical contemporaneity in relation to what I call speculative timeliness. Sixth, I will turn to the above questions about Hegel's dialectical middle between eternity and time, between speculative logicism and hermeneutical historicism. In some final reflections I will argue that, regardless of Hegel's intent, or rather because of ambiguities in the plurality of his intentions, the dialectical middle is to be criticized for collapsing time's other into time. This collapse calls for a rearticulation of time's other in such a manner that its otherness as other is not dialectically reduced. This would be to reaffirm the need for speculative mind, but in a sense not exclusively determined by Hegelian dialectic.

All this will become more intelligible as we proceed but it is consonant with the position I develop throughout; namely, that Hegel does stand in a complexly articulated middle where his intention is not any univocal reduction of otherness to sameness; standing in that middle, nevertheless, he does claim to mediate all otherness, which becomes a moment of the dialectically self-mediating whole. This, I hold, does result in subordinating otherness to dialectical self-mediation. I, too, want to stand in the middle but there the crucial question is: Can the middle be articulated entirely in terms of dialectical self-mediation? I grant that dialectical self-mediation is indispensable to the articulation of the middle, but if it makes claims to *mediate totally* that middle, it closes thought off from forms of otherness which, if they are to be mediated, are to be mediated in terms other than dialectical self-mediation.

We must dwell in the middle dialectically, but this dialectic can never be closed. For we must also dwell in the middle in a different non-dialectical way, the metaxological way. This way articulates a logos of the *metaxu*, the middle, but in such a manner that it points to an *intermediation* with otherness that cannot be reduced to dialectical self-mediation. Hegel, I grant, does inhabit the complex middle. To the extent that the claims of dialectical self-mediation are total, he is reductive of otherness. To the extent that he is open to otherness in the middle, Hegel's own thought, often against the grain of its explicit intentions, is the carrier of traces of otherness that are not and cannot be dialectically domesticated. Hegel is often both these sides. And even though he is predominantly the first, his dialectical dwelling with the middle opens up *for us*, unavoidably, the possibility of the second intermediation, the metaxological way.

### Speculation after Hegel: Modern and Postmodern Historicism

The issue of historicism has haunted Hegelian thought and thought after Hegel. Moreover, it is very wrong to confine the issue to nineteenth-century philosophy. I find it helpful to distinguish a post-Hegelian and a post-Nietzschean historicism. The first is a logically optimistic historicism, the second a hermeneutically suspicious historicism. The first is logically optimistic: history reveals the progressive unfolding of reason towards its *telos* in time. The second is hermeneutically suspicious: in history we see the consolidation of reason, as the repression of alogical energies of being which in themselves have no inherent or rational *telos*. The first is dialectically constructive or reconstructive, the second is deconstructive in an anti-dialectical manner. For instance, Marxist historicism is a mix of suspicion and optimism: it reveals itself as *hermeneutically suspicious* in its revolutionary critique of capitalist society; but it is *logically optimistic* in relation to the dialectical necessity of historical progress and the coming communist utopia. By contrast, Heideggerian historicism and post-Heideggerian deconstruction dominantly show *suspicious historicism* in their attack, not only on Platonic eternity, but also on any logically optimistic historicism: if there is here any logic to history, it is the tale of the superimposition of logic on the alogical powers of history by ontotheological metaphysicians. I will have more to say about Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger below.

Hegel's thought, precisely because of his dialectical middle, has been subject to vagaries of historical interpretation. Considering his fortunes since his death, philosophers periodically have seen fit to announce what they claim (in Croce's now hackneyed words) is dead and what is still living in Hegel. As a dialectical middle offers a mediated unity of opposites, from this middle Hegel's successors have often picked and chosen what they deem suitable to their own purposes. What is dead for one commentator miraculously comes alive for another, and vice versa. Since his individual death, Hegel has had many subsequent deaths, and also many resurrections. The strife between right and left Hegelians was only the first battle over what was vital legacy and what superseded refuse in the remains of the Hegelian middle. Hegel returned to life in Anglo-American thought in the latter half of the nineteenth century, only to suffer an inevitable crucifixion, by philosophers suspicious of speculative metaphysics, like Moore and Russell. Hegel has always been a presence in contemporary European thought, recently as representative of everything that has to be "overcome." The father Hegel has to be repeatedly killed by

his anti-Hegelian sons. But he must also be kept alive or brought to life again. If Hegel lacked this posthumous life, he could not be the antagonistic other to be repeatedly opposed. Hegel has to be repeatedly resurrected to be repeatedly crucified.

The crime of philosophical parricide is not common in academic studies of Hegel. We find family squabbles or logical bitching or textual *apologia*—a tame contrast to the ideological wars that in the past have swirled around Hegel's name. Instead of the civil wars, even world wars of ideological struggle, the "Hegel revival" means the civilized scholarly war of textual contestation. Many still revile Hegel and the type of philosophy he epitomizes, but the unavoidable fact is that he is still a living presence in contemporary philosophy. Even if the sophistication of our abuse only reaches the level of the jeer, this is only to confirm his tenacity as an enemy who resists being dispatched. Moreover, we cannot jettison Hegel because the fate of philosophy is also bound up with political history since Hegel. Without Marx's influence, Hegel's shadow would not be cast so long. While that influence is now in a drastic decline, still Hegel's ghost is not laid. Nor will the downfall of Marx necessarily inter Hegel. It may perhaps resurrect his ghost one more time, the ghost of an other Hegel.

The issues of "postmodernity" take shape here. Postmodernity is bound up with the notion that we are in a period of post-history. This, in turn, is connected to the Hegelian idea of the end of history. The thesis of the end of history implies that the modern age articulates all the essential possibilities of spirit in its dialectical realization of freedom; in articulating them temporally, modernity has exhausted the repertoire of possibilities. What remains disputed is the full actualization of the possibility, the worldly embodiment of the spirit of freedom.

In the past, the Left-Hegelian, especially the Marxist, claimed to be Hegel's rightful heir. The worldly embodiment of freedom in history is to be concretized in the Communist state. This state is the end of history—the society of social freedom beyond the dialectical war of master and slave, exploiter and exploited. The undermining of the credibility of totalitarian communism now has offered the opportunity to Western conservatives to appropriate the Hegelian theme of the end of history. Liberal democracy is extolled as the end of history. Hegel in his grave would turn uneasily at the apotheosis of the instrumentalized spirit, contained in the elevation of consumerist culture into the absolute. This end of history would be the end of philosophy in the dissolution of speculative mind into the means/end system of instrumental consumerism.

Marx's relevance to the issue of speculation and history is almost exemplary in this sense. His thought strips the dialectic of all speculative dimensions; speculation is reduced to history, now considered as the temporal self-production of the human. Hegel's successors, and Marx very explicitly, do him the honor of first discovering the historical character of the human being's self-creation, albeit, it is quickly added, in a manner "mystified" by his religious concerns. Many thinkers, not necessarily Marxists, share such a view which broadly runs: Though indeed Hegel spoke of absolute spirit, and with a mystical bias emphasized the intimacy, indeed identity of man and God, he nevertheless places strong stress on becoming, process, development. All such ideas bind us to the historical. The intimacy between the human being and God is historically revealed in the Christian religion, where Hegel sees the dialectical identity between the human and divine. Hegel correctly identified the human and divine, but wrongly hypostatized spirit into some power transcending man. The human is identical with the divine because the divine is identical with the human, namely, an alienated projection of human power, which now must be restored to its true human source and hence to its non-alienated form.

This view asserts indeed a dialectical middle between the human being and *Geist*, but only because spirit is the human spirit, not some other power. In fact, *Geist* is nothing other than, nothing but, human activity developing itself and coming to determinate articulation through the dynamism of the historical process. Though Hegel implies a *Weltgeist* transcendent to the human spirit, by articulating the dialectical middle between the human and the divine, he really shows that there is no *Weltgeist* other than the human. Rather humanity is just the *Weltgeist* of the historical world in that human power brings history into being and moves it as a meaningful world. History is the production of human and not divine power. The progressive development of humanity towards emancipation from all alien powers becomes synonymous with historical progress.

It is generally admitted that Hegel took history seriously, and in terms close to the above characterization. I think, however, that the difficult questions only now begin. What does it mean for philosophy to take history seriously? Hegel's answer makes no sense without philosophy as a venture of speculative mind. Relative to this venture, the seriousness of time is to be thought, but this seriousness is manifest from a standpoint not itself identical with time as normally comprehended. It is not too wrong to say that history for Hegel is ultimately devoid of seriousness if divorced from the speculative. History is not just farce, though it has its comic deflations and tragic



resonances. To take history seriously is to determine the intelligibility it discloses. But the ultimate principles of temporal intelligibility are not exhaustively characterized as but the *products* of temporal genesis. Temporal genesis is the production of eternity, and is intelligible as the disclosure of this.

Much more needs to be said on this, and will be said. For now we recall that Hegel wanted to avoid those extremes that subsequently defined the left and right Hegelians. The left Hegelians reduce eternity to history. To reject this reduction is not, contrariwise, to advocate the negation of history, its dissolution into eternity, a view sometimes imputed to the right Hegelians. Hegel is neither right nor left. These extremes play one side of Hegel's complexity against another. The real issue is neither the reduction of eternity to time, nor the annihilation of the historical in the trans-historical. It is to comprehend what it is that ultimately grounds the conjunction or intermediation of the two. This is the problem of the middle.

While Hegel's intent was to articulate this middle, does his working out of this intent lend itself to the extremes just noted? I think that it does, and mainly because of ambiguities generated by the dialectical middle in relation to time's other. I return to this question below: Namely, even if history is intelligible as the production of eternity, does history so exhaustively determine the dialectical unfolding of eternity that any other, transcendent to history, becomes completely mediated by history, and hence immanent to history? Hegel, I believe, answers in the affirmative. But we are not yet in a position fully to understand this view which, in claiming to retain the speculative dimension, sets him at a significant distance from the simplistic reduction of Marx.

"The immediate *task of philosophy*," Marx says ". . . is in the service of history. . ." <sup>2</sup> This service makes him rethink the inner essence of Hegelian dialectic but by turning it to economic, social, and political history and hence shearing it of all its speculative dimensions. So Marx accuses Hegel of reducing the history of alienation to a history of alienated thought: history becomes the production of abstract thought, which Marx identifies with logical and speculative thinking. For Hegel true mind is logical, speculative mind; hence the human character of production, its historical character, is reduced to the production of abstract mind. <sup>3</sup> While Hegel's "outstanding achievement" is the "dialectic of negativity," which allows us to understand the "self-creation of man as a process," nevertheless Hegel's speculative philosophy is a *masked* vision, which in its speculative hiding ends up as a "mystifying criticism." <sup>4</sup>

Like many critics, Marx judges the speculative philosopher to be an alienated thinker, with all the idealistic embarrassments Hegel had with the transition from Logic to Nature. It is as if the eternalist mind cannot reconnect with history: the logician, as the voyeur of time, cannot be incarnated in its concrete body. I am reminded of Aristophanes suspending Socrates in a basket above the stage of drama: the speculative philosopher dangles in the empty air of alienated thought. Aristophanic comedy debunks the emptiness of abstraction in terms of the alogical laughter of the body. Historical materialism shares a not dissimilar debunking attitude to speculative mind. Aristophanes would also have mocked at the risible pretension of historical materialism to have the master key of history.

There is here an interesting congruence between the Christian and atheistic critics. Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel is not at all unlike Marx's; both claim he is an abstract, alienated thinker. Kierkegaard sees Hegel as a pure eternalist, eternalist in the sense in which logical truth is necessarily true, *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the abstract logical eternity of the philosopher, the philosopher's God that can be thought in abstraction but to whom one cannot pray. Kierkegaard, not without ambiguity, invokes his own notion of eternity, dependent on Christian revelation. Kierkegaard, like Marx, wants to refuse to the philosopher the alienated luxury of abstract thought and to reveal his logical eternity as a sterile ideality. Both make Hegel a logical eternalist, though their respective senses of the *concreteness* of history are radically different.

Marx wanted to re-ground knowledge and action upon a nontraditional basis. Hegel completed and exhausted the contemplative task of thought. It remained to displace philosophy from contemplation to action, from speculative thought to historical praxis, and so to institute knowledge as an instrument of revolution. The metaphysics of eternity must be replaced by the revolutionary reason of concrete history. Philosophy must cease to wonder and its thought be reversed into a weapon. A different reversal can here occur. Marx may do Hegel an unwitting favor: He becomes less a decisive break with Hegel as a pointer back to him, and so indirectly to the entire tradition of speculative philosophy Marx claimed to surpass. Instead of an indirect confirmation of Marx via Hegel, we discover the revolutionary Marx as a truncation of the speculative Hegel. I say "truncation" with all its connotation of a violent cutting. At a time when we have done with worshipping Marx, we must ask if his excision of speculative philosophy has produced a diminished body of thought that in the long run, if untreated, will die from the wound it believed it had inflicted on the speculative other. This wound on thought seems really self-inflicted.

Marx's truncation reduces speculation to purely historicist thought by collapsing Hegel's absolute spirit into objective spirit: the historical realms of morality, economics, civil society, politics. "Hegel has merely discovered an *abstract, logical and speculative* expression of the historical process, which is not yet the *real* history of man as a given subject but only the history of an *act of creation*, of the *genesis of man*."<sup>5</sup> The speculative absolute is really only an aftereffect of concrete history, mistakenly identified by the idealistic philosopher as its ground and origin. German philosophy is merely the *ideal prolongation* of German history.<sup>6</sup> So we must invert the origin and the aftereffect. ". . . We Germans have lived our post-history in thought, in philosophy. . ." In the collapse of absolute into objective spirit, the denigration of speculation is its supersession by historical praxis. "Real" history is tied up with the realization and abolition of philosophy; speculative philosophy is resolved only by means of practical activity. . . ?

When Hegel keeps open the difference of objective and absolute spirit, he wants to preserve speculative mind as not entirely reducible to the historicity of objective spirit. Absolute spirit articulates the speculative sense that reason is at work in forms of being, nature, and subjectivity included, that seem the work of what is outside reason. The three forms of its activity are art, religion, and philosophy. Certainly these are made possible by processes of historical unfolding, development, and support. But for Hegel they give articulation to *Geist* as a dynamic power not reducible to any one time, since it cuts across time as the ultimate generating basis of time's own intelligibility. Art, religion, and philosophy are those forms of activity that most deeply express the human condition and its mediated relation to the ultimate generating source of time itself. They are historical products in one sense, yet they mediate what for Hegel cannot be reduced to a mere product of historical production, namely, *Geist* itself as the actively *producing* power of history. History ultimately gains its intelligibility only in relation to absolute spirit as the trans-temporal dynamism of being, articulated in determinate form in time. Art, religion, and philosophy are each different articulations of the middle, each implicated in different ways with the speculative dimension of being. In the middle of history, each of these as a historical production of *Geist* serves to remind us that *Geist* itself is not just a historical production.

Relative to historicism this implies: Intelligibility is not exhausted by humanity's historical constitution, but rather this constitution is made possible by more primordial principles of intelligibility. If so, philosophy not only needs to be properly cognizant of history, and

of its own history, but relative to the middle, it must confront a dialectic between an excess of history and an absence of history. The philosophical middle must avoid two extremes: on the one hand, an approach so ahistorical that it lacks concrete insertion in the historical world wherein we become and find ourselves; on the other hand, an approach so historicist that we fail to find significant constancy of intelligibility in being, as the mind staggers directionless from relativity to relativity. The speculative middle, whether dialectically or metaxologically conceived, seeks an equilibrium between the demands of history and what Dostoevski called those "accursed eternal questions."

Marxist history violently represses these accursed questions. They are repressed as metaphysical distractions from an historical *praxis* that would absolutize itself. These accursed questions make us skeptical of any absolutization of the historical. They condemn us to irremediable exile from the historical complacencies of every temporal home. They keep us off balance with the radically unsettling thought of time's other. Post-Hegelian history itself shakes asunder all historical complacencies. These accursed questions not only shake the foundations of historical complacencies, but also make it incumbent on us to ask if there are any such foundations in history at all.

In modernity's amnesia of time's other and its hollowing out of all trans-temporal grounds to time, the Marxist anti-speculative truncation reduces God to man as the maker of history. But after Marx we find the further reduction: instead of being the maker of history, the human being becomes the victim of history. The repudiation of the human absolute quickly follows that of the divine absolute. God is said to die with the unfolding of the dialectic of post-Hegelian history, but so also does man, so say Nietzsche and Foucault. And now in the iron age of post-history, postmodernism still twitches with all the anxieties of time to which modernity previously had been prone. Its response seems to accentuate these twitches of time, accentuate them as if this were to celebrate the Nietzschean innocence of becoming. After Hegel, and more so after Marx and his progeny, we cannot be innocent, least of all about time, and the slaughterbench that modern history has produced. These twitches are, so to say, the afterlife of modernity's corpses—the ghost of its dead spirit, wandering in the contemporary *Zeitgeist* without grave or rest in a hallowed ground.

The question then is: Does postmodernity, as post-history, merely prolong the proper disenchantment of later modernity with history? Is the postmodern celebration of the innocence of becoming just a sly Nietzschean dissimulation of its spiritless weariness with history?

Are its calls for otherness the most effective way of perpetuating the *same* modernity, without a philosophical bad conscience vis-à-vis modernity's anxieties about time? Or does the true need of time's other ask us to radically rethink the speculative? Must we become speculative philosophers again, perhaps of a different kind? Does Hegel offer us a genuine option between the haunted afterlife of postmodernity and the living spirit of speculative mind? Or does his own version of speculative mind, and his rendition of the dialectical middle between time and time's other—do these sign for modernity the remote death warrant of deathless eternity?

### Radical and Moderate Historicism

The serpent turns. Before we can address such questions, we need a fuller understanding of historicism itself. Historical consciousness is generally taken to be a relatively recent innovation in Western culture. Essential to this innovation is the belief that human affairs must be understood on a developmental model. It is sometimes implied that the Greeks had no such concept of history. But Plato and Aristotle were by no means unfamiliar with the dynamic nature of things, were indeed acutely aware of genesis. Yet their interpretation of change circled around the possibility of an ideal stability. The genesis of a thing manifests its nature in so far as the thing is in process to be itself. The ideal or *eidos* is that *telos* to which the genesis of a thing is directed, at which telic point the individual thing becomes identical, or approximates identity, with its essence. *Phusis*, nature is essentially purposive. In that sense, the nature of a thing is its purpose. Form and finality cannot be sundered.

History implies reference to human acts, *rēs gestae*, and not just to the dynamic nature of all things. For the Greeks human events were themselves natural, with the proviso that human nature has its own specificity and difference. The modern historical consciousness, by contrast, tends to be marked by a sense, not of the human being's difference *within* nature, but of its difference *from* nature. This view secularizes the religious ascription to the human being of sovereignty over a created nature, itself set off from God. From this sense of difference, scientifically secularized by Cartesian dualism, springs the disjunction between nature and history, or in the cognitive sphere between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*.

The rise of historicism in the nineteenth century was motivated, in part, by reaction to the positivistic reduction of the specifically human to the rest of nature, nature conceived here not in Greek terms

but in terms of mechanistic science. One can understand, indeed subscribe to this affirmation of the difference of the human over against the mechanistic. The result, however, has sometimes been a *new dualism* of the human being and nature. Far from resolving the problem, this dualism initiates a new one. How far do we go in the assertion of the difference of the human being? If we push this assertion in a certain direction the outcome might be that splintering of "the two cultures," the scientific and humanistic. Pushed further, the assertion of difference can splinter the integrity of the human into a disseminated diversity of fragments. Can we situate deconstructive *différance* here, as a masked rejoinder to a disguised dualism?

The dualism of nature and history helps us highlight two related responses. One response reduces the historical to the natural, such that human action is understood in terms not essentially different from what makes any natural process intelligible. This is a *naturalistic reduction*. The other response harbors the *historicist reduction*. Then we claim a freedom for the historical, a freedom that might take different forms. For instance, we might hold that the developmental dimension of the human being is decisive for all its knowing. Even natural science is itself the product of a development of reason, historically determined. Then we are tempted to invert the positivistic reduction of the historical to the natural, and claim comprehensiveness for the historical. We cannot uphold the independence of nature to the human being, since we cannot abstract from the human being. In history, it is said, we come to knowledge of human events. In nature, it also seems, we come to know *ourselves* in the end, and not some cosmos abiding in inviolate otherness or objectivity.

Consider the point this way. One of the chief characteristics of the human being is its active nature. We are not passive before an otherwise ready-made world. We are agents. Or as Nietzsche says: Man is the unfinished animal. Through this our agency we constitute a human world; without it, what is before us sinks into dull unintelligibility. We do not possess a ready-made identity, but come to be a self in an open process of making oneself. History, it is said, is just this process of humanity's self-making. History is the articulation of the unfinished animal, or if you like, a sequence of drafts by the human being whereby it essays to portray the power of its activity and so define itself. History is the humanization of the unfinished animal.

As I understand it, the issue is not the defense or denial of our active nature, but rather the interpretation of its significance. Historicism is one such interpretation. For our purposes we might distinguish a moderate and a more radical historicism.<sup>8</sup> The moderate sense claims that even if nature is independent of history, neverthe-

less, our comprehension of it is conditioned by historical circumstances. A distinction between nature and history is admitted. Though the emphasis falls on the historical, nature subsists as a limitation, despite the fact that everything we say about it is irremediably conditioned by history. This limitation may be differently interpreted, yet any recognition of it prevents history from becoming the *inclusive* context of all meaning. Something may still lie beyond history, though for our access to it, history must always function as gateway. In granting man's active power, we must acknowledge boundaries that restrain its absolute self-assertion. History is circumscribed by an otherness. Human freedom, though real, is not absolute; it is constrained by necessities, albeit opaque and difficult to determine.

The second, more radical historicism interprets our active power as a drive to the extreme of absolute autonomy. Wherever possible, this stronger historicism will eradicate every restraining heteronomy. As with any historicism, this second view claims that the human being produces itself, coming to recognize itself in its productions. But carrying this to the extreme, it is asserted that *all* we recognize, *all* we can recognize, is the human itself. A total claim is made here. Anything other than the human is not to be acknowledged as finally other. Indeed if anything intimates its otherness, nature for instance, this is not taken as refutation. Any such intimation of resistant otherness becomes rather a spur pricking the strong self to place *itself* in that space of otherness. Here we have a *program* for the historicization, humanizing of such otherness, such that once again man can be said to recognize nothing but himself, even if sometimes, as here, this self-recognition is mediate and indirect.

This radical historicism obliterates the difference between the human and nonhuman in the very historical process of mediating that difference. Its eradication of this difference is effected by means of the self-assertion of the absolute difference of the human being. Its mediation reduces the difference, not by reducing history to nature, but by subsuming nature into history. Nature is absorbed into history as itself simply one more of humanity's historically conditioned perspectives. The truth of nature, then, is not nature's truth but man's truth, and so itself a historical construction. The upshot is that history closes in upon itself and becomes the *only horizon* of significance and intelligibility.

The historicist Hegelianism I noted at the outset, though it might employ categories that serve to qualify or disguise its implications, seems to me to be underpinned by presuppositions such as I have just outlined. The anthropological counterpart to this historicism is an anthropocentric humanism wherein man is the beginning, middle and

end, wherein his active power is dedicated to the task of humanizing whatever is. *The human being claims to be the absolute middle.* Since through the medium of historical self-production, humanity produces *itself*, it claims to be the beginning of history. Since it produces *itself for itself*, it claims to be the end of history. Thus, this anthropocentrism tries to produce the closure of historicism, closure in these three senses: closure of the historical in itself as putatively a completely self-mediating realm of meaning and being; closure of the historical to any putatively radical otherness, whether of nature as a limiting otherness, or eternity as an irreducible other to time; closure as completion of the historical in the project of the human being to be a completely self-mediating power.

With respect to the last closure, any non-historical limit becomes a barrier that the human being, in principle, can surmount. Similarly any constraint on human freedom is said to be only provisional. Freedom rather defines its own limits, indeed defines itself in the surmounting of limits, which on reflection turn out to be merely self-imposed. The human being is not limited by a human nature which intrinsically defines it, one which, though capable of different manifestations in different times, still is constant as a principle of continuity across different times. On the contrary, the human being has no abiding nature; its nature is itself a historical product, and as such infinitely malleable, as Nietzsche and Sartre assert. The human being is not defined by an intrinsic humanness that sustains continuity. Rather its plastic power is the possibility of radical discontinuity.

So it is not surprising that this radical historicism coexists with a will to *revolution*, that is, the faith in man's capacity to institute radical discontinuity. Marx's view of history clearly points in this direction. The name "historical materialism" indicates just that sublation of nature into history, mentioned above. As Marx puts it, except maybe for a few coral reefs, nowhere does nature exist in a purity untouched by human hands. What we find in nature is historical, the intervention of the human. We need only recall Marx's infatuation with *industry*. Industry, he proclaims, is the open book of human powers. Industry is that material appropriation of human power, which allows us to appropriate the power of material nature. The record of history is the tale of industry through which human beings become free of natural, and indeed supernatural necessities. History is the history not of God's grace but of man's work. For Marx the dialectical middle of history will be the site of struggle for the completely autonomous self-mediation of human society. There will be no absolute other.



### **Historicism and the Instrumentalization of Speculative Mind**

Where does Hegel stand? Clearly Hegel is deeply attentive to the active, historical nature of the human being. One way he puts this is: The human being cannot be fully understood as substance; it must be grasped as subject, that is, as self-conscious, self-determining being. But despite this stress on humanity as historically self-determining, Hegel cannot be unequivocally assimilated to historicism in either of the two senses delineated. Let us take the first moderate sense.

Hegel distinguishes nature and history, and admits that our knowledge of nature presupposes the development of certain historical conditions. Similarly, history itself cannot be totally abstracted from natural necessities. Yet the human knower can have a true knowledge of nature. One can come to know nature as nature, and not just as a categorial grid, subjectively constructed, that we impose on an otherwise unintelligible nature. Human reason is articulated through historical development; but in its coming to articulation, reason can free the human knower from the limitations of self-enclosed subjectivity, and from the constraining particularities of historical conditioning. Reason opens out to what is, regardless of whether it is nature or history. True knowledge of nature is true of nature; it is not just a reflection of the subjective knower taken as totally opposite to nature. On this point a careful reading of Hegel will show that his idealism is an uncompromising realism.

There is no absolute barrier separating the knower from nature's intelligibility. But if there is no such barrier, do history and nature collapse into each other, forcing us to claim Hegel as a historicist in the second sense? In this more radical sense, nature is subsumed into history, any radical distinction between them disappears, and history becomes the only and ultimate horizon of meaning. I do not think Hegel intends the disappearance of this distinction. It might seem so, in that Hegel certainly holds that reason can appropriate the truth of nature. But to appropriate the truth of nature can mean to understand nature as it is. This need not imply any obliteration of the distinction between nature and history.

There is, however, a more fundamental reason why we cannot assert univocally that history is the one and ultimate horizon of intelligibility. There is a third term besides nature and history, necessary to the determination of the intelligibility of both. As Hegel puts it in his philosophy of nature: "God reveals himself in two different ways: as Nature and as Spirit. Both manifestations are temples of God which He fills, and in which He is present."<sup>9</sup> The

reference to God may be here taken as a representation that points us to the ultimate ground of intelligibility. Following traditional usage, we can call this third term (which is really the first), eternity. Without this third first, we could not ultimately ground the openness of reason (that is, its orientation to truth), nor prevent the collapse of nature into history, nor put any limit to the assertion of the absoluteness of the historical, taken alone.

The idea of eternity is not a univocal concept. It allows a plurality of possible interpretations, including the static eternity of Parmenidean being with its long influence on Platonism and Christian theology, the logicist eternity of necessary, trans-temporal truth, the agapeic eternity of some theistic views, the eternal recurrence of Nietzsche. One must also include what I call an "erotic absolute": an eternity in process of striving to become itself, in process of determining itself fully in the productions of time which are its own self-production. I would include Schelling, Whitehead and process philosophy, as well as Hegel himself, as proponents of such an erotic absolute. This matter will be addressed further below, particularly the difference between an erotic and agapeic absolute, since this reflects a crucial difference between the interpretation of being in terms of dialectical self-mediation and metaxological intermediation.<sup>10</sup> But we must dwell further on speculative reason and historicism.

The question we recall is: Are the grounds of temporal intelligibility exclusively the products of temporal genesis; if not, is there a sense of speculative mind that, while capable of offering a philosophical hermeneutics of the historical, is not itself simply historicist? The following, additional considerations are significant for the modern, historicist consciousness. They cast light on what I see as a widespread but essentially wrong *instrumentalization* of speculative mind.

Reason for the historicist is not a given, just there, outside of any development in time. Reason is something historically constituted. As a construct, it must be determined by more primordial principles that generate it. But if so, reason must become dispossessed of any sovereignty, even in fields where its exercise seems paramount, for instance, in the mathematical sciences. Consider here how sometimes the mathematical sciences are described as theoretical *constructions* or *created systems*. A crucial implication of this description, one not always drawn, is the necessity of some constructing, creating power that itself cannot be absolutely identical with reason in use *within* the constructed system. Should he admit such a principle of construction, the mathematically bent philosopher turns out to be peculiarly akin to thinkers who appear to be his antithesis, thinkers like Nietzsche, for example.

For Nietzsche too reason is not sovereign; it is derivative; it is a creation, an expression, an instrument of the will to power. To illustrate this kinship of the mathematician-philosopher and the thinker of the will to power, we need only mention Descartes. Descartes was one of the first moderns who explicitly coupled knowing and power, despising as useless ancient speculative metaphysics, desiring a new science which would make man, in his famous phrase, "the master and possessor of nature." On the matter of reason and power, the mathematical technician, Descartes, is not entirely different to Nietzsche, the poetic rhapsode.

If there is a more ultimate source of reason that itself cannot be said to be rational, then the use of reason within a historically constructed system must become essentially instrumental. Action becomes more fundamental than contemplation, will comes to dominate reason, praxis provides the justifying end of theory. On this view, any speculative claim to reason's sovereignty must be an inversion of the true state of affairs. The hermeneutics of suspicion will suspect such claims as merely more idealistic, but masked instrumentalizations of a source that is not itself rational. Thus, Marx will condemn Hegelian reason as idealizing a state of affairs that in its true reality is irrational: the Hegelian rationalization of the real is the idealistic mask of its real irrationality. Thinkers like Nietzsche will indict reason as a comforting illusion that protects us from the Dionysian darkness at the basis of all being, what in relation to Schopenhauer's will I termed the dark origin.<sup>11</sup> This, too, is said to be beyond the principle of sufficient reason; thought through to the proper conclusion, it must topple reason from its throne.

When we put the question to this historicist instrumentalization of reason, What distinguishes good reason from bad? very often the answer given is *success*. Good reason works. Reason tends to be instrumentalized not only in its origin and operation, but also in its end. As a means to an end, reason is directed to goals that are not themselves the outcome of reason but the product of some extrarational source of valuation. There is nothing intrinsically valuable about reason as an instrument. When reason is thus instrumentalized, it becomes the handmaid of the powers that be, if you happen to be a conservative, and of the powers that will be, if you happen to be a revolutionary. Especially in the latter case, philosophy ceases to be *theōria*; the tool of history it now becomes is, as we saw before with Marx, a weapon. Not metaphysical astonishment, Plato's wonder, but ideological war in history's service becomes the work of the philosopher.

This instrumentalization of reason is pervasive in modernity. Its pervasiveness in presupposition and praxis makes us take the matter as self-evident. But such self-evidence is not at all evident. Suppose reason is to be defined as nothing but a product of historical process; can we then, strictly speaking, give any reason for the historical process itself? This question returns us to the issue of the seriousness of time. In trying to answer it in present terms, we confront peculiar consequences. Since reason is a product of history, this other reason of history (in the sense of ground) cannot itself be reasonable. If reason is only a product, it would seem that the *producing* ground of the historical process cannot be anything but irrational. We must admit also, it seems, that this irrational ground is more ultimate than the rational, and that the ultimate basis of intelligibility is itself unintelligible.

But then reason becomes the product of the irrational. And since what the irrational produces, the irrational may also destroy (with or without reason!), reason cannot be said to possess any intrinsic worth. This entails that reason may be brushed aside without reason. Reason becomes all but indistinguishable from unreason, as but another fortuitous formation of the irrational. Since all history seems to have a nonrational ground, and since reason seems to be but one of history's products, reason itself cannot have a rational ground. As grounded in the irrational, reason is not rationally grounded at all. Reason is another form of unreason, which some accept only because of taste or convention, while others do so just out of plain timidity to risk the disruptive power of a more uncompromising irrationalism. In a word, reason is only the *temporary sobriety* of unreason.

This issue centers on the question: What, if anything, is there absolute about reason, and what, if anything, does reason reveal as absolute? This question reveals the unavoidably speculative nature of the issue. Despite the bar by Kant, or Marx, or Nietzsche, the speculative springs up again. For the historicist there can be nothing absolute about reason, for the reasons just adumbrated. If reason is just a result of the historical process, by that fact, it is less absolute than this its generating source. The implication must be that the irrational, or let us say the arational, is absolute, if anything is. The difficulty, however, is that we are compelled to but cannot give a philosophically satisfactory rational justification of this view. We find ourselves with a peculiar "absolute" that cannot stand to reason. Perhaps we are then driven to "prove" this absolute by other means; for example, by revolutionary praxis, or by heralding the advent of the superman, or by invoking the all comprehensive success of global technology. Can we rest satisfied with this? I think not. All such